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This time, the CIA boss liked the questions

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Stansfield Turner is certainly accustomed to facing questioners.

As director of the Central Intelligence Agency, he is used to having to come up with answers for Congressional committees, the occupant of the Oval Office and an inquisitive press. It isn't always a pleasant task.

Friday afternoon, Admiral Turner was being besieged by questions at every turn, and was enjoying every minute of it. The questioners were primarily the youngsters from throughout the U.S. who are in Owensboro to join with Turner and other celebrities in the American Academy of Achievement's weekend retreat.

During an informal rap session that brought the youths and adult honorees together, Turner was among the most popular targets for questioning. And he added to his answers an expression of his views about the youngsters and what they mean to the future leadership of this country.

"I tell you," he said, "I'm really impressed by what you people know . . . these are great questions."

The questions ran the gamut, from recruiting practices of the CIA ("We have people who go out to 150 college campuses every year, where they set up a table and put up a sign that says 'CIA' and go about recruiting bright people") to the agency's relationship with President Carter ("It's outstanding.").

Turner tackled an admittedly loaded question in assessing the relative intelligence capabilities of the U.S. and Russia. "They're better in human intelligence," he said, adding that the Russians "flood the market" with operatives. But the U.S. is better in "technical" intelligence, Turner said. He noted that agencies not only have to collect information, but then have to have the ability to research and analyze it. "You can do a better job of that in an open society than in one that is closed."

He touched several times on the restrictions against the CIA today, noting that the agency cannot initiate a "covert" action without the approval of the National Security Council, the signature of the President and notification to eight congressional committees. In such notification, Turner must be specific as to objectives of the covert action, but is not required to divulge any information that might put a CIA operative in danger.

On the relationship between the FBI and the CIA, which has been rocky in the past, Turner said, "They're the boss inside this country, we're the boss outside . . . it's a matter of teamwork."

He noted that he has greater accessibility to the president than any past CIA director, with a once-a-week in-person briefing with Jimmy Carter and six-days-a-week written briefings.

Asked about the relationship between his agency and the public, again something that has been very rocky in the past, Turner called it "improving, and we hope we deserve it."

He added that the agency is far more public in what it is doing than has been the case in the past, including the releasing of large numbers of unclassified studies and a general sense of openness in comparison with past operations. That openness explains his coming to Owensboro for the Academy of Achievement event. "This group is a particularly good forum," he said. "I'm really persuaded that you need to get to this age level to get a fair hearing. These are the brightest kids in the U.S. today."

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